

STRESS MANAGEMENT

By Phillip Dooley, Co-Chair, Civil Rights Committee

Stress is a natural biological response to unusual demands. It is the survival mechanism that allows the body to react quickly and release extra energy to fight off danger. Often referred to as the “fight or flight” reaction, it is the quick response we use when we slam on our brakes, for instance, to avoid hitting another car. The body releases adrenalin, the heart beats rapidly, breathing increases and perspiration starts to flow. Once out of danger, we begin to relax. However, negative stress never allows us to relax. In a stressful work environment, workers experience all the common stress reactions (rapid heartbeat) on a daily basis. Most are in a state of constant alert. They never have an opportunity to return to a normal state of relaxation. This chronic stress wears and tears on the body. Stressed workers generally feel unhappy. They are usually irritated and easily angered or fatigued and depressed. Symptoms can include

chronic headaches, gastrointestinal problems, lower back pain, insomnia and rapid loss or gain of weight. As a way to relieve their job stress, people tend to smoke, drink alcohol and/or use drugs.

You can help relieve stress by eating the right foods and exercising regularly, but in the long run the only cure for workplace stress is changing the working conditions. This is a big job that no individual can do alone. By working together with the company and the members, we can get management to reduce workplace stress. **Worker participation** allows workers to have input into decisions affecting their job. **Work scheduling** is designed to accommodate workers' families. **Job responsibilities** involves designing tasks that provide meaningful stimulation and the opportunity to use and improve skills.

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